

Deceit Magnified

The Western World's Appraisal of Eelam War IV

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The last stage of Eelam War IV in Sri Lanka in 2008/09 has generated a large volume of literature. In addressing the issues arising from this work, it is possible to proceed by assertions founded upon previous articles with their supporting evidence.¹ The focus here is on the pursuits of the US State Department through its point man in Colombo, US Ambassador Robert Orris Blake Jr., as well as its 'auxiliaries' in the UN and European Union.²

The arguments here are deliberately provocative. They commence with 11 assertions that highlight a worldwide ignorance of alarming proportions in 2009, a shortcoming that persists today. From late 2008 the Western media and government were mostly oblivious to these 11 facts:

1. That in late January 2009, as the British Defence Attaché in Colombo noted then, it was "not possible to

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1 The literature on this topic is vast and my own writings are numerous. In particular, see Citizen Silva 2013: Noble 2013 and the several items Roberts.

2 We are assisted here by the Wikileaks material. See Michael Roberts, "Ball-by-Ball through Wikileaks: US Embassy Despatches from Colombo, 2009: ONE", 2014, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2014/08/27/ball-by-ball-through-wikileaks-us-embassy-despatches-from-colombo-2009-one/>.

distinguish civilians from LTTE cadres, as few cadres are now in military uniform.”³

2. That by mid-2008 the LTTE had devised a grand strategy directed towards creating a picture of “an impending humanitarian catastrophe” with the objective of stimulating forceful Western intervention to save their project in circumstances where they were outgunned and outnumbered.⁴
3. That the mass of civilians was deployed by the LTTE as ‘tinder’ for this picture, while also serving as just so many ‘sandbags’ in the Tiger defensive formation.⁵
4. That KP Pathmanathan⁶ had been re-installed as the head of the LTTE’s international operations on December 31, 2008, with the prime objective of

3 Michael Roberts, “Reflections: Interpreting the Gash IV”, August 27, 2018, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2018/04/29/reflections-interpreting-the-gash-files-iv/> (quoting a secret document from Lt Col Gash that has only been revealed recently). Also see LTTE War Video 2013 where civilians are firing machine guns or walking purposefully with weapons.

4 See Michael Roberts, “Generating Calamity”, 2014 and De Silva-Ranasinghe 2009. Note a subsequent discovery that sustains this assessment: “Without the presence of the IDPs the LTTE would be subjected to unrestricted air and artillery strikes, so have no incentive to release them” (Gash in his secret despatch of January 28, 2009, Roberts, “Reflections: Interpreting the Gash IV,” 2018).

5 Michael Roberts, “BBC-Blind: Misreading the Tamil Tiger Strategy of International Blackmail, 2008-13”, December 3, 2013, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2013/12/08/bbc-blind-misreading-the-tamil-tiger-strategy-of-international-blackmail-2008-13/#more-11221> and Michael Roberts, “Generating Calamity, 2008-2014: An Overview of Tamil Nationalist Operations and Their Marvels”, 2014, <https://groundviews.org/2014/04/10/generating-calamity-2008-2014-an-overview-of-tamil-nationalist-operations-and-their-marvels/>.

6 KP Pathmanathan was from the same little town VVT as Prabhakaran and was the latter’s best man at his wedding in India in 1984. He was placed in charge of the LTTE’s international operations at an early stage and was based in Thailand. He was a mastermind in this work and his displacement circa 2002 via the appointment of Castro and others contributed to the decline of the LTTE in the first decade of the 21st century.

instigating Western intervention directed towards spiriting the Tiger leaders to a favourable country.⁷

5. That Pathmanathan convened a secret meeting at Kuala Lumpur in mid-February⁸ which brought together the Norwegian ambassador in Lanka, two Norwegian diplomats from back home and two senior LTTE activists from the international arena⁹ in a conspiracy involving the US that was directed towards forceful intervention in the war.
6. That in accordance with these intentions, an American Pacific Air Command visited Sri Lanka in order to work out a plan for this line of intervention (a scheme that was torpedoed by backroom Indian veto).¹⁰
7. That this intervention was in pursuance of a policy devised by the US Ambassador Blake from late 2008 under the influence of a new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and her advisors (Susan Rice and Samantha Power).¹¹

7 See Jeyaraj, “KP” *speaks out: An Interview with former Tiger Chief*, Kum Pvt., Vavuniya, 2011, pp. 23-25. The countries in the Tiger scheme were Eritrea, South Africa and East Timor, Ibid, p. 34.

8 See Mark Salter, *To End a Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka*, Hurst, London, 2015, pp. 348-49 and 355-56. Salter does not give the precise date of this meeting in Kuala Lumpur or even the date or source for Blake's note on this topic (pages 355-56). We can surmise that these omissions are deliberate.

9 Namely, V. Rudrakumaran from USA and Jay Maheswaran from Australia.

10 See, Michael Roberts, “Where USA sought to arm-wrestle Sri Lanka in March-April-May 2009,” May 11, 2018, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2018/05/11/where-usa-sought-to-arm-wrestle-sri-lanka-in-march-april-may-2009/> and Balachandran, P. K. “PK Balachandran on Overt & Covert Paths in Indian and American Policies towards Sri Lanka, 2008-09,” September 26, 2015, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2015/09/16/pk-balachandran-on-overt-and-covert-faces-in-indian-and-american-policies-towards-the-sri-lankan-war-2008-09/>.

11 Ishanka Jayatilaka holds that Richard Armitage was a major driver within the US administration in directing this line of policy and that he was particularly close to the Norwegian Foreign Service personnel. She also

8. That Blake consistently pressed both warring parties in 2009 to establish a ceasefire, while being resigned to the fact (in despatches to Washington) that the LTTE would not heed any such demand – in effect rendering the diplomatic pressure one-sided and one way.¹²
9. That this high-handed intervention was taken to an extreme point in mid-March 2009 when Blake directed the Sri Lankan, Secretary of Ministry of Defence, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, to cease military advances via a veiled threat: “sending the army in would be disastrous for Sri Lanka.”¹³
10. That Blake then pressed the demand home by telling Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama on March 18, 2009, that “Sri Lanka would likely meet war crime charges” if they continued their military advance – a threat that was in tune with the warning issued by Navanethem ‘Navy’ Pillai, the UN Human Rights Commissioner, five days previously¹⁴-an indication to us today that the US and key UN agencies were operating arm-in-arm.

indicated that in 2015 the US ambassador in Colombo, Atul Keshap, had a key role in preparing the US sponsored resolution against Sri Lanka in the UNHRC in 2015 (phone chats and email, October, 14 2018).

- 12 Michael Roberts “Ambassador Blake in Never-Never-Land: Misreading LTTE Capacity in Early 2009,” August 26, 2015, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2015/08/26/ambassador-blake-in-never-never-land-misreading-ltte-capacity-in-early-2009/> and Roberts, “Ball-by-Ball through Wikileaks: US Embassy Despatches from Colombo 2009: ONE”, 2014.
- 13 Blake indicated this to Washington in his Despatch No. 283 of 12 March 2009. In another despatch on the March 18, 2009, Blake noted that he had cautioned Foreign Minister Bogollagama by noting that “Sri Lanka would likely meet war crime charges” if they continued their military advance. Note that, on the first occasion on March 12, Gotabhaya played poker: he said that the SL Army “would take a passive stance”.
- 14 Mark Salter, *op.cit.*, p. 352.

11. That these interventions were partly directed by concerns for the fate of the many civilians trapped on the north-eastern coast and included schemes of US naval intervention¹⁵ – an ostentatious humanitarian emphasis that has to be qualified by the import of the rescue schemes hatched by Pathmanathan and Norway at Kuala Lumpur and by the disclosure in Washington on May 6, 2009 from US Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia, Michael Owen: “...some in the Tamil community do have legitimate grievances, and we need to find — [and thus] I think it’s imperative for Sri Lankans to find a way to give everyone in the community, all Sri Lankans, a legitimate voice in their government.” Owen then spoke of the USA’s “desire to negotiate an LTTE surrender to a third party via a “limited amnesty” as a step that would initiate “the beginning of a political process.”¹⁶

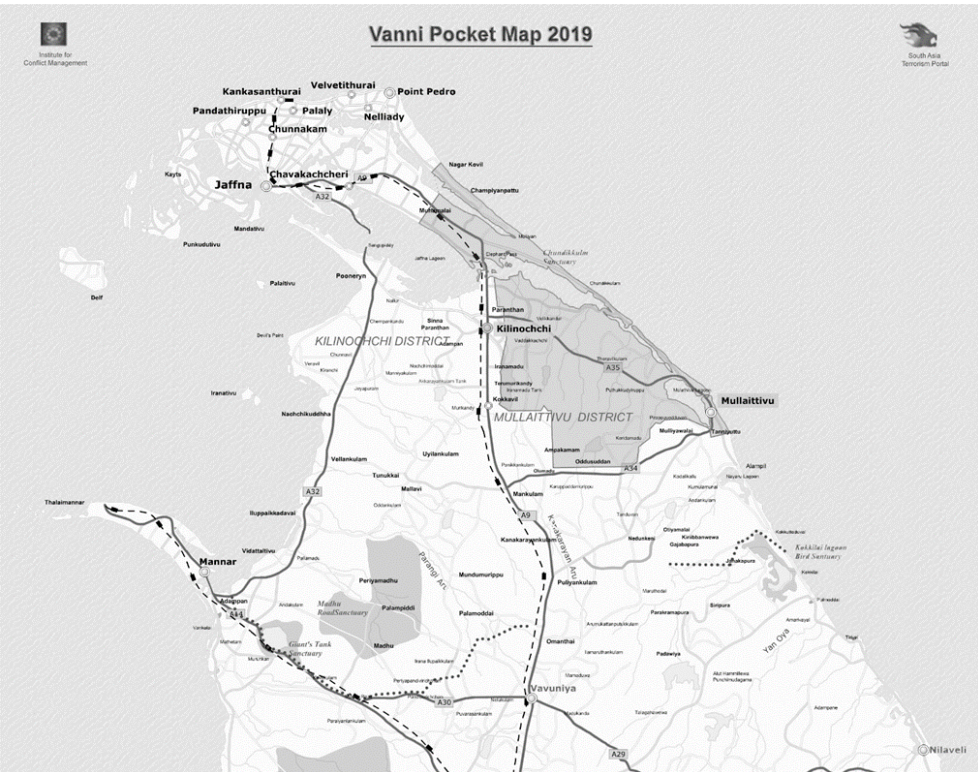
This striking list of occluded facts was shored up by a set of exaggerations and lies peddled in the Western media as well as the UN. Thus, it was widely asserted

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- 15 This line of policy has been drum-beaten subsequently by Robert Blake (Sri Lanka Brief 2017). This is not pure concoction: his despatches displayed this emphasis and he was even willing to be airlifted to LTTE territory to negotiate such a plan. However, this evidence must be balanced by the revelations from Pathmanathan extracted by Jeyaraj (2011) and indications that Blake was ready to hand Pirapāharan over to India (see secret despatch 33 of January 9 in Michael Roberts, “Ball-by-Ball through Wikileaks”, 2014). Thus, the other Tiger leaders would have been taken to an US ‘hatchery’ in Eritrea, South Africa or East Timor.
 - 16 See full quotation in Daya Gamage, “The American Agenda for Sri Lanka’s National Issues, 1970s-2014,” July 5, 2014, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2014/07/05/the-american-agenda-for-sri-lankas-national-issues-1970s-2014/>.

12. That the events occurring on the war front were terra incognita since it was “a war without witnesses”¹⁷ – even though 131 local and foreign journalists were ferried to the front by plane on day-visits (mostly) between the January 1 and May 15, 2009.¹⁸
 13. That the government forces were indulging in merciless artillery bombardment.
 14. That this shelling and the military advances were exacting a horrific civilian death toll – with figures sent by satellite phone by Tamil NGO officials and/or Tamil medicos working under the LTTE being served up and circulated as ‘conclusive proof’ of such outcomes.¹⁹
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- 17 This was the catch-phrase constantly repeated by Ravi Nessman of Associated Press from the moment that he spoke on the Tavis Smiley show in USA on the February 18, 2009 (see Ravi Nessman, “The War in Sri Lanka: Ravi Nessman’s Slanted Story for USA on the Tavis Smiley Show, 18 February 2009,” January 31, 2014, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2014/01/31/the-war-in-sri-lanka-ravi-nessmans-slanted-story-for-usa-on-the-tavis-smiley-show-18-february-2009>). However, Nessman had been snapped by Kanchan Prasad of Prasar Bharathi on a SLAF plane as well as the rear battle front in late January 2009 (see photos in Nessman 2014). Even today in September 2018 a senior Sri Lankan reporter from Associated Press told me that it was “a war without witnesses” when I contacted him on the telephone from Adelaide.
- 18 This is a list that extracted from an SL Army officer who was at a talk on the IDP camps which I presented at ICES in 2011. It is reproduced in Roberts, *TPS. Pictorial*, 2014, pp. 252-63. I note here for the benefit of lay readers that it is rare for reporters to gain access to the interface of fighting in any war situation where battle lines are sharply drawn in rural terrain. Where reporters have been caught in cross-fire, it has usually been in locations where the fighting is in mosaic patches and in confused and swirling urban landscapes.
- 19 As an Indian journalist in Colombo noted sarcastically: “none of these westerners raised any inquiries as to how the various Tamil informants in LTTE terrain had access to satellite phones.” As a further indictment of Nessman and Weiss, I note here that (A) Weiss was reprimanded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for using the term “bloodbath” in an interview aired for Associated Press in early April 2009 and that (B) on the May 13,

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This picture became widely entrenched in the West and remains active to this day.



MAP I- Situation Map on January 6, 2009 depicting the “Vanni Pocket” where the fighters and civilians of Tamil Eelam were cornered

It was because this picture was so widely entrenched and because further calamity was deemed to be around the corner that the Foreign Ministers of Britain and France rushed to Sri

2009 Nessman regurgitated the claims of severe shelling and many deaths presented by human rights agencies in UK who were repeating claims on *TamilNet*.

Lanka in late-April 2009 and ordered the President to cease military activity. Mahinda Rajapaksa, however, did not kowtow to this gunboat diplomacy and squashed the effort.²⁰

Its fiasco notwithstanding, the Miliband-Kouchner effort reveals the position taken by the West tout court. Most arms of the UN (but not the Security Council) were an integral part of this Western course of action. Various UN officials visited Sri Lanka at different moments in 2009 as elements in this line of intervention: Tamrat Samuel in mid-February 2009; John Holmes on March 26, 2009 and Vijay Nambiar on April 15, 2009.

A little later, when the LTTE was finally crushed by May 18, 2009 the Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon rushed to the island and visited the IDP camps on the May 22, 2009. He then flew in a helicopter over the coastal stretch in the Vanni Pocket where the final denouement had taken place (see Map I). He summed up his reading from the air thus: “seeing complete devastation and no movement of human beings” – a viewpoint that grabbed world news headlines.²¹

Ban Ki-Moon’s reading displays one of the major problems bedeviling the assessments of the war: namely, the gross incompetence of powerful political figures arising from their limited experience of warring scenarios. If Ban Ki-Moon had taken note of the aerial pictures of that very same war zone on the

20 Michael Roberts, “David Miliband’s Imperious Intervention in Lanka left in Tatters,” July 5, 2016, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/david-milibands-imperious-intervention-in-lanka-left-in-tatters/>.

21 See Michael Roberts, “Reading “devastation”: Botham, CMJ and Ban Ki-Moon,” in Roberts, *Tamil Person and State Essays*, Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo, 2014, pp. 259-73. There were no human beings THEN on 22/23 May because the civilians had fled or been rescued and taken to IDP camps, while most Tiger personnel had been killed or captured. Note, too, that this coastal area is wind swept and the abandoned tents and gear would have been subject to the force of such elements. See the selection of snaps in Times 2009.

coast before the final battles occurred therein,²² he would have seen that this particular arena had been immensely crowded and was in fact a tent city in many parts, with the existing houses located only in certain localities and that too in a pattern that was not wall-to-wall. Fortunately, a cameraman stringer was in the same helicopter as Moon. So, we have photographs that enable one to assess the arena within Moon's compass then in mid-May and to note the several undamaged red roof-tops.²³

Such evidence indicates a biased reading on Moon's part. His appraisal, moreover, is overshadowed by the careful assessment of the last stages of the war in the north-eastern corner of the island provided by the former Head of SAS, Major General Holmes in 2015: "the SL [Army] did not rush in, but instead took its time to plan and adapt its tactics to take account of the civilian presence. It was, in the view of the author, an entirely unique situation and the fact that 290,000 people escaped alive is in itself remarkable."²⁴

22 The pictorial evidence of the civilian settlements in the "Last Redoubt" on the coast in the period February to early May 2009 which are available in *TamilNet* and a range of sources are valuable for this reason. For a selection, see Michael Roberts, *Tamil Person and State. Pictorial*, Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo, 2014 and Michael Roberts, "Congestion in the "Vanni Pocket" January-May 2009: Appendix IV for "BBC Blind," <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2013/12/09/congestion-in-the-vanni-pocket-january-may-2009-appendix-iv-for-bbc-blind/>. Also see Kanchan Prasad, 2011 "Two Indian Reporters' Post-War Pictures at the LTTE's Last Redoubt, May 14-19, 2009," June 2011, <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/blogs/southasiamasala/2011/06/10/two-indian-reporters%E2%80%99-post-war-pictures-at-the-ltte%E2%80%99s-last-redoubt-may-14-19-2009>.

23 See "TIMES Aerial Images," <http://www.flickr.com/photos/thuppahi/sets/72157626922360092/> and for the commentary on some snaps, see Michael Roberts, *Tamil Person and State Essays*, Vijitha Yapa Publications, Colombo, 2014, figs. 11-16. Also see Prasad "Two Indian Reporters' Post-War Pictures at the LTTE's Last Redoubt, May 14-19, 2009," All the houses in this part of the coast would have been new dwellings built after the arena was flattened by the tsunami of December 26, 2004.

24 Military Expert Opinion by Major General (Retd) John Holmes, in Paranagama Commission Report, 2015. pp. 243-44. Also note, D.B. S. Jeyaraj, "Wretched



Figure 1 – Source *The Daily Mirror*, late April 2009.

Moon’s venture into the island is profoundly significant. It heralded the line of punishing action that the Western world and its UN handmaidens took over the next months and years. Sri Lanka was literally hauled over the coals by UNHRC resolutions from 2009 to 2012.

Perhaps the most significant project on these lines was the UN Panel of Experts appointed in June 2010 with Marzuki Darusman as Chairman and Yasmin Sooka and Steven Ratner as members. Its investigations and its assessment from afar without visits to the island were characterised by glaring deficiencies in its range of sources. An evaluation by a competent team from the Marga Institute in Colombo concluded that its methodology was slipshod. They criticised the UN Panel of Experts (UNPoE) Report for paying no heed

of the Wanni Earth break Free of Bondage,” *Daily Mirror*, April 25, 2009, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/380>; B. Muralidhar Reddy, “An Escape from Hellhole,” *The Hindu*, April 25, 2009, <http://www.hindu.com/2009/04/25/stories/2009042558390100.html> and Vidura “The Great Escapes,” *Sunday Leader*, May 17, 2009.

to “the restricted battle space” involving LTTE fighters (many without uniforms) amidst a mass of civilians in most localities within the coastal strip which was the focus of battle from mid-April-mid May.²⁵ To present just one illustration from the Marga reviews:

The report focuses only on civilian casualties and gives no information of Tiger units coming under fire in close proximity to the civilians, something which many eyewitnesses have admitted to seeing themselves. Leaving this out of the Panel’s narrative suggests that there was very little or no military activity in the areas around the civilians, and that therefore there was no reason for any shelling by the SL Army.

Such grave shortcomings notwithstanding, the UNPoE’s findings dominated the world’s media waves. Its leading conclusions were that (A) “A number of credible sources have estimated that there could have been as many as 40,000 civilian deaths. [and] multiple sources of information indicate that a range of up to 40,000 civilian deaths cannot be ruled out at this stage;” and that (B) these “credible allegations, ... if proven, indicate that a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law was committed by both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, some of which would amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity” (emphasis added).

25 See Marga, “Preliminary Summary re the Marga Seminar on the UNPoE Report”, drafted by Godfrey Gunatilleka, 2011, <http://www.margasrilanka.org/Darusman-Seminar%20Report.pdf>; Marga, “An Analysis and Evaluation of The Report of the Advisory Panel to the UNSG in the Final Stages of the War in Sri Lanka”, 2011, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/0eybj1ynej6spaa/The%20Darusman%20Report-%20Final%20doc-2.doc> and Marga, “Truth and Accountability. The Last Stages of the War in Sri Lanka”, 2011, <http://www.margasrilanka.org/Truth-Accountability.pdf>.

WHAT HAPPENED FROM THEN ON?

As a Sri Lankan observer named Harshula carefully illustrated, a troupe of respectable HR organisations and media outfits converted “credible allegations” into “credible evidence” in wielding and disseminating this quotation worldwide.²⁶ Amnesty International and International Crisis Group abroad as well as *Groundviews* in Sri Lanka were among those who perpetuated this deceit. Only *Groundviews* altered the reference after Harshula pointed out the error. Thus armed, media personalities such as Kerry O’Brien, Amanda Hodge and Gordon Weiss in Australia and Jon Snow of Channel Four in Britain disseminated this distorted quotation during a visceral campaign against the Government of Sri Lanka and its head, Mahinda Rajapaksa.²⁷

The duplicity, amplification and specious thinking that resulted in such definitive exaggerations should not obscure the root cause behind the bloated death toll figures circulated around the world. From the outset very few people had any idea about the number of people (whether civilians, conscripted aides or fighters) assembled within the “Vanni Pocket” in, say, January-February 2009. The figures presented by the Government of Sri Lanka were gross underestimates; but so too were those noted by Ambassador Blake in some of his despatches: thus, one despatch on 19th March noted that

26 Harshula, “When allegations becomes evidence,” June 6, 2011, <http://groundviews.org/2011/06/06/when-allegations-become-evidence/> and Harshula, “Channel 4 ‘Killing Fields’: Journalism, Advocacy or Propaganda?” September 13, 2011, <http://groundviews.org/2011/09/13/channel-4s-killing-fields-journalism-advocacy-or-propaganda/>.

27 The horrendous assassination of the respected editor of *The Sunday Leader*, Lasantha Wickrematunga, on January 8, 2009 – clearly, at face value, by elements in the Sri Lankan defence establishment — had raised the bar of hostility in media circles in Sri Lanka and the West; while alienating liberal thinkers in both domains.

“the US and some others [are] engaged in intensive efforts to protect the estimated 120-150,000 civilians ... from shelling” (Wikileaks).

In the light of subsequent knowledge, in fact, our calculations of the total civilian-cum-fighter population circa February 2009 must move into the 300,000 range, while yet applying adjustments over time to take account of the numbers escaping by sea²⁸ or on foot or being evacuated by agreements on both sides via ICRC ships under SL Navy escort.²⁹

But that is retrospective knowledge from subsequent overviews. Then, in the year 2009, some observers chose to rely on the figures presented by Parthipan, one of the senior Tamil officials in the Vanni Pocket, who presented a guesstimate based on statistics from household and tent sites collected by his underling *gramasevakas* over the course of February 2009: namely, the figure of 33,600 residents in what was, by then, the remnant state of *Tamil Eelam*. This was a gross figure in the worst sense of the term “gross” -- because it was not a head count and because 31,694 Tamil civilians escaped by foot or by sea, or been formally evacuated, during the month of February.³⁰

28 At least 3,389 escaped by sea according to the reports provided by Lt. Col. Gash (see Michael Roberts, “The Gash Files III: Trapped Tamils out by Sea,” April 20, 2018, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2018/04/09/the-gash-files-iii-trapped-tamils-out-by-sea-in-2009/>).

29 Citizen Silva somehow tracked the ICRC summaries and recorded 31 voyages between February 9 and May 9, carrying 13,794 persons. Figures from 23 of these trips show a total of 10,103 with the following breakdown: 1789 injured/sick males; 3537 injured/sick females; and 3,471 children -the rest being defined as “caretakers” – see Michael Roberts, *TPS. Pictorial*, 2014, Fig. 95 on page 140.

30 See details from Citizen Silva “The Numbers Game: Politics of Retributive Justice,” 2013, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/132499266/The-Numbers-Game-Politics-of-Retributive-Justice> reiterated in Michael Roberts, “Revisiting Critical Issues in Eelam War IV: Summarizing Citizen Silva’s The NUMBERS GAME,” November 10, 2017, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com>.

It appears that the UN Panel arrived at the guesswork figure of 40,000 dead by subtracting the rough figures for the number of survivors (both those deemed LTTE and those deemed IDP) in the camps under government control in May-June 2009 from this crude Parthipan estimate. This was horrendous guesswork.

Parthipan's estimate of 336,000 for the total population was also overshadowed by the figure of 436,000 which the fervent nationalist Bishop Rayappu plucked from thin air – a figure which encouraged some writers (e. g. Frances Harrison) to suggest that the death toll could even be 146,000 (436,000 less 290,000 survivors).³¹ With the alternatives of 146,000 or 70,000 or 40,000 civilian deaths being touted by various international agencies, some observers from afar may have considered the lower figure to be a reasonable option.

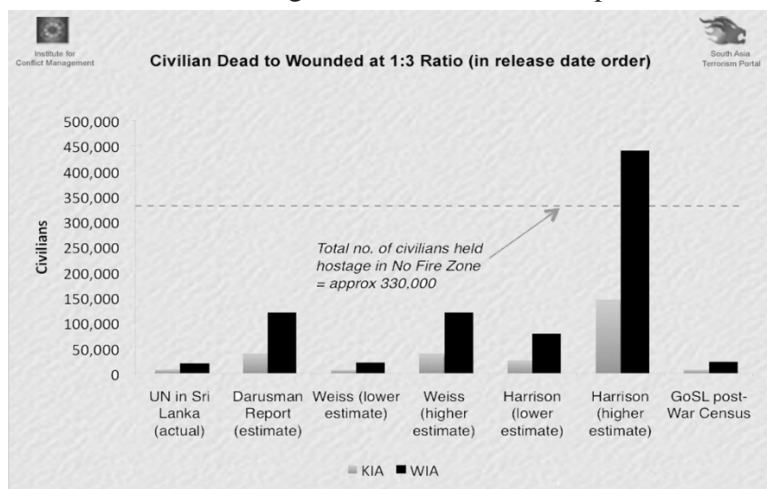


Figure 2: A graph of the various estimates prepared by Mango 2014

com/2017/11/10/revisiting-critical-issues-in-eelam-war-iv-summarizing-citizen-silvas-the-numbers-game/ as well as Frances Harrison, *Still Counting the Dead*, Portobello Books, London, 2012, p. 337.

31 Frances Harrison, op.cit., p. 238.

For educated commentators to give credence to this shadowy guesswork is amazing. Major General Holmes said as much: “[t]he figure of 40,000 civilians killed which has been repeatedly published is, in my view, extremely difficult to sustain on the evidence which I have seen.”

Many observers have been oblivious to one of the cardinal statistical ‘rules’ relating to casualty figures in war: namely, that the wounded or “Wounded in Action” (WIA) always outnumber the dead or “Killed in Action” (KIA). One medical report that reviewed the casualty ratios in wars from 1940 to 1988 reached this verdict: the “number of people wounded is at least twice the number killed and maybe 13 times as high.”³² During the Korean War the ratio for wounded US soldiers was over three: 103,284 WIA against 33,651 KIA.

Versed as they should have been in the travails faced by the Australian troops during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915-16, one would have expected such Australian media men as O’Brien and Weiss to have brought some of this experiential sense into their evaluation of the UNPoE’s statements. Within the restricted physical arena of Gallipoli³³ in 1915, the casualties on all sides were heavy. In that context, 8,709 Australians were

32 See R. Coupland and David R. Meddings, “Mortality associated with use of weapons in armed conflicts, wartime atrocities, and civilian mass shootings: literature review.” *British Medical Journal*, 1999, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.319.7207.407> and Mango, “Sri Lanka’s War In Its Last Phase: Where WIA Figures Defeat The Gross KIA Estimates,” February 14, 2014, <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lankas-war-in-its-last-phase-where-wia-figures-defeat-the-gross-kia-estimates/>.

33 The confined physical extent of the area to which the LTTE and its remaining ‘sandbags’ of civilian people had been reduced by April 2009 was not dissimilar to that of the Gallipoli Peninsula, though the latter was hilly and criss-crossed with gullies.

killed (KIA) and 19,441 were wounded: thus, the ratio of WIA to KIA was 2.23.³⁴

The UN Panel of Experts as well as numerous commentators with university degrees in their belt did not raise a simple question: if 40,000 Tamils had died, where were the 80,000 wounded? As it happens, in May-June 2009 after the fighting ended, the UN personnel in Colombo had computed figures for the wounded in hospitals and detention centres. This computation is referred to in passing by the UNPoE: “The United Nations Country Team is one source of information; in a document that was never released publicly, it estimated a total figure of 7,721 killed and 18,479 injured from August 2008 up to 13 May 2009, after which it became too difficult to count” (paragraph 134, UNPoE).

The UNPoE and numerous commentators in subsequent surveys have simply bypassed the implications of this data – a mark of their office room blindness compounded by prejudice.

Thus, we see that a wide range of political figures in both the West and Sri Lanka failed to transcend their office-room deficiencies in computations of the death toll. Why? One’s answers must necessarily be conjecture. To denote the reasons in point-form:

- A. Some, such as Sanjana Hattotuwa of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, have been directed by their sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamils because they believed that the Tamil people have been denied

34 Michael Roberts, “A Drama in Four Acts: Dishonest Reportage by Amnesty International and Aussie Journalists remains Unmasked,” September 2, 2015, <https://wordpress.com/post/thuppahi.wordpress.com/17560>.

“identity, belonging and dignity”³⁵ in the course of Sri Lankan politics extending from 1956-to-2009.

- B. Some were animated by a moral fervour that has been blinding.
- C. Some were directed by a visceral dislike for Mahinda Rajapaksa and his regime for a variety of reasons including its various excesses.
- D. Some powerful figures in the corridors of Western states were determined to pursue their political goals in the Indian Ocean and desired to wreak vengeance on little Lanka for defying its dictates in the period 2006-2009.³⁶ When no less a person than the US Ambassador to the UNHRC, Eileen Donahoe, spat out “we will get you” to her Sri Lankan counterpart, Tamara Kunanayakam, within the stately corridors of the UN in Geneva,³⁷ we know that the primeval desire for revenge had been provoked within powerful entities.

It is as ironic as it is tragic that such big-power strategies are supported by personnel attached to strands of secular fundamentalism in ways that persuade them to support

35 Sanjana Hattotuwa, “Identity, Belonging, Dignity. Lessons from Francis Fukuyama for Sri Lanka Today,” October 2, 2018, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2018/10/02/identity-belonging-dignity-lessons-from-francis-fukuyama-for-sri-lanka-today/>.

36 In my surmise the key drivers behind USA’s targeting of Sri Lanka have been Hillary Clinton (Secy-of-State), Samantha Power, Susan Rice and Richard Armitage. From her researches Ishanka Jayatilaka is convinced (personal communication) that Richard Armitage was the key figure shaping US policy.

37 Tamara Kunanayakam, “A Tour de Force by Tamara Kunanayakam in Reviewing THE RAJAPAKSA YEARS”, February 23, 2016, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2016/02/23/a-tour-de-force-by-tamara-kunanayakam-in-reviewing-the-rajapaksa-years/>.

interventions in favour of fascist dictatorships – the LTTE in this instance. One of the intriguing sidelights arising from any survey of the debates among Sri Lankans to this day is the picture of Sinhalese of liberal, radical and Marxist persuasions pinpointing the excesses (e. g. the killings associated with “white vans”) during the Rajapaksa administrations, while sliding over the numerous assassinations and huge bomb blasts in civilian space effected by the LTTE as a consistent programme of war and terror. Located physically within the south western regions of Sri Lanka, during the period 1990-2009, their hostility to the “Near Enemy” constituted by the various shades of Sinhala chauvinism has overwhelmed their attentiveness to the “Far Enemy” constituted by the fascist state of Tamil Eelam³⁸ under Velupillai Prabhakaran. The imbalances in their evaluations are glaring. But belief, or faith, as they say, has always been blind.

38 Note the arguments in Michael Roberts, “Pirapāharan’s Inspirations and Mind-Set”, August 10, 2018, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2018/08/10/pirapaharans-inspirations-and-mind-set/> and Michael Roberts, “Pirapāharan’s Thamililam, 1990-2009: Aspirations and Achievements”, September 6, 2018, <https://thuppahi.wordpress.com/2018/09/06/pirapaharans-thamililam-1990-2009-aspirations-and-achievements/>.